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Report of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund on the work of its 2007 first regular session*

(16-19 and 22 January 2007)

Addendum

Joint meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP

A. Natural disaster preparedness

1. The President of the UNICEF Executive Board invited the UNICEF Executive Director to introduce the background paper and discussion on behalf of UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and WFP. She highlighted the importance of community resilience, national ownership and leadership and joint action, recommending five measures: (a) link early warning to early action, especially by communities; (b) reduce disaster risks for communities and increase their response capacity; (c) make emergency systems more dependable; (d) improve the capacity to mobilize and manage emergency response; and (e) enhance the focus on reducing risks, as recommended in the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015. Risk reduction should be integrated into country team approaches, the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF); all efforts should link with government development plans.

2. The need to link preparedness with development was also emphasized by the Director, Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, Belgium, who summarized trends and impacts. Over 400 major disasters are reported each year and, though mortality has decreased, economic losses and the number of people requiring support are mounting. This trend is due especially to the increasing vulnerability of populations, particularly the poorest, who often live in high-risk areas. She called for improved evidence-based planning and community capacity.

* The present report, submitted as an addendum to the report of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on its first regular session (16-19 and 22 January 2007), is a summary of the discussions that took place during the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund and the World Food Programme, held on 19 and 22 January 2007; it was prepared jointly by the secretariats of the funds and programmes.

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3. In his presentation focusing on the experience of the Philippines, the Administrator, Philippines Office of Civil Defence, advocated for a participatory, integrated approach emphasizing community preparedness, risk reduction and early warning, with local governments playing a key role. The Philippines strategy includes an upgrading of the forecasting system; public information campaigns; sustained disaster-training at all levels for response and risk reduction; and the strengthening of government and private response capacities.

4. In presenting the lessons learned based on the United Nations country team experience in Pakistan, where disaster management is well developed, the UNDP country director in Pakistan cited three gaps: limited expertise in long-term recovery and risk reduction; inadequate financing for preparedness and risk reduction; and a narrow donor interest in 'search and rescue'. Efforts must emphasize the involvement of all United Nations organizations, long-term disaster preparedness and risk reduction, capacity development at all levels, and non-governmental organization and civil society organization involvement in community-level preparedness.

5. The delegation of Pakistan clarified that the document "National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework" circulated at the session was still a working draft under consideration by the Government of Pakistan.

6. Delegations affirmed the urgency of enhancing national preparedness and risk reduction, calling for several measures: integrate risk assessment, disaster preparedness and risk reduction into all development activities and frameworks; integrate national with international early warning systems; improve information systems and information-sharing; foster greater inter-country, regional and South-South cooperation; integrate all aspects of disaster management; provide training and awareness-raising for decision makers at all levels; develop capacity at all levels, particularly in communities; strengthen internal preparedness plans and capabilities of United Nations organizations; clarify the roles and contributions of each organization, particularly in risk reduction; achieve closer United Nations collaboration with respect to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, including for the cluster approach; and adhere to the Hyogo Framework for Action.

B. Millennium Development Goal 1: Interlinked approaches to poverty alleviation

7. The President of the WFP Executive Board opened the session by inviting the Director of the Policy, Strategy and Programme Support Division and officiating Deputy Executive Director for WFP to introduce the background paper on behalf of the four organizations.

8. In his summary of the paper's central arguments, the Director noted that the four agencies have jointly identified a number of principles to guide enhanced integration: (a) common understanding of objectives, strategies and policy instruments; (b) pooling of resources and capacities in design and implementation of programmes; (c) integration with, and support for, national priorities; and (d) rigorous procedures for monitoring and evaluating progress towards key targets, with clearly defined intermediate targets. Commitment and investment in line with these principles are already in

motion. For integrated approaches to become institutionalized and commonplace in programming, the four organizations must continue to invest in overcoming enduring political, conceptual, operational and capacity obstacles.

9. The Minister of Planning from the Government of Liberia was invited to provide a field perspective on interlinked approaches to poverty alleviation. He focused on ongoing efforts to develop an interim poverty reduction strategy (iPRS). The experience of Liberia suggests that two related issues are crucial: national ownership of the strategy development process and prioritization among competing investment alternatives.

10. National ownership and appropriate prioritization were ensured by linking development of the iPRS to a broader effort to promote recovery and reform. A Liberia-specific comprehensive and integrated approach emerged featuring four pillars: ensuring peace and security; revitalization of the economy; strengthening governance and rule of law; and rehabilitating infrastructure and basic services. The Government of Liberia expressed confidence that, if supported by all partners, the resulting iPRS will serve as a platform for sustained recovery and growth. The Minister ended by encouraging the four organizations to deepen their involvement in Liberia with a view to improving coordination, information sharing, mutual accountability and partnership.

11. Questions and comments were invited from the floor. Discussions among delegations yielded the following conclusions: all parties must do much more if the targets of Millennium Development Goal 1 are to be met; efforts to integrate strategies, plans and investments are crucial; countries are the central players in efforts to reduce poverty and hunger, but in most cases they cannot do it alone, requiring assistance from partners, including the four organizations; efforts toward greater integration should be concentrated at the country level, and United Nations reform processes open considerable scope for such integration and concentration; the Millennium Development Goals, poverty reduction strategies, CCAs, UNDAFs and a range of regional and subregional platforms must be used to help catalyse and focus integration efforts; such efforts should be explicitly results-oriented, taking into account relevant national and global factors; and the four Executive Boards must be more cognizant of their responsibilities in promoting integration and joint activity, especially at the country level.

C. United Nations reform

12. The President of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board opened the session by expressing appreciation for his election as Board President and outlining the critical work to be done in the coming year. He opened the floor to the chairperson of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG).

13. The UNDG Chair and the Director General of the International Labour Organization introduced the topic of United Nations reform. The UNDG Chair reiterated that reform would create greater accountability to national partners by managing and sharing technical expertise, add effectiveness through the 180-degree mutual performance appraisal system and strengthen the resident coordinator system. Articulating common positions and strategies for the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes would also help governments to realize their national development strategies.

The Chair underscored that the eight 'One United Nations' pilot countries should be considered experimental, each with unique circumstances affecting the approach, results and lessons.

14. The Director General thanked the Board and stressed that great challenges lie ahead but great opportunities also exist. Indicating that 'Delivering as One' must respect the mandates, governing structures and uniqueness of the organizations involved, he outlined the importance of tackling the systemic and procedural differences of each. He cautioned about moving too quickly, which might jeopardize reform initiatives; he raised concerns about funding imbalances in the multilateral system, which could fuel a discrepancy between the concept of 'One United Nations' and reality on the ground. In closing, the Director General outlined the challenges faced by resident coordinators, stressing the need for technical preparation, knowledge of the work of agencies, funds and programmes through reciprocal training, and reinforcement of the resident coordinator role at regional and sub-regional levels.

15. Some delegations emphasized the need to ensure continued support by the United Nations system in providing financial and technical support while protecting national priorities and enhancing country ownership. Several supported the eight pilots as the heart of reform efforts, which would draw upon the resources and capacities of the entire system to deliver coherence and coordination. Others expressed concern about the pilots, highlighting the danger of a potential disengagement between the implementation of some of the proposals of the High-level Panel and intergovernmental consultations on those recommendations. A number of delegations were interested in learning more about how the efficacy of the pilots in promoting coherence, efficiency and effectiveness would be determined. Some expressed concern that resident coordinator reforms might add bureaucratic administrative layers. Several delegations felt that the pace of United Nations change must be scaled up, with a stronger focus on accountable, transparent performance and results.

16. At least one delegation felt that funding to pilot countries might provide truer outcomes if agreed-upon levels were maintained. The delegation also felt it would be helpful to have access to internal audit reports of the individual funds and programmes to increase transparency. Almost all delegations cited the report and recommendations of the High-level Panel as extremely useful in the context of the ongoing reform debate. Several expressed a desire for the Executive Board to play a greater decision-making and guidance role.

17. The UNDG Chair and the Director General provided brief responses. Pilot countries are helping determine the important details that factor into the 'One United Nations' effort and are driving discussions at the intergovernmental level. Changes to the resident coordinator system will not create added bureaucracy; resident coordinators will draw from existing resources in their functioning. The UNDG Chair cautioned that coordination must not be mistaken for 'large meetings' and stressed that earmarked funds are affecting financial efficiency. The Director General concluded by reaffirming the tremendous potential for the resident coordinator to extract synergies and eliminate overlap and duplication.

D. Gender dimensions of HIV/AIDS

18. The session was introduced by the President, UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board. The UNFPA Executive Director spoke on behalf of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP, addressing the priority issues pertaining to the gender dimensions of HIV/AIDS. She provided examples of joint actions in the United Nations system and highlighted the challenges. The Director of the National STD/AIDS Programme in Brazil presented the experience of the country in addressing the feminization of the epidemic. It was followed by a presentation by the Africa HIV/AIDS advisor for the International Planned Parenthood Federation, focusing on the importance of male involvement in addressing HIV/AIDS. Finally, a representative of the Asian Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (and a member of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS Programme Coordinating Board) shared a personal perspective regarding her fight against HIV/AIDS.

19. The panellists highlighted the importance of the 'Three Ones' principles for the coordination of national responses and commended the four organizations for promoting greater South-South cooperation and discussing issues that represented the new global agenda, including the Millennium Development Goals. They underscored the need for increased financial commitment towards fighting the epidemic and the importance of targeted programming for adolescents and youth, with a strong focus on gender issues such as power relations, gender-based violence and the burden of care on women and girls.

20. Delegations welcomed the presentations and the cooperation and collaboration among the four organizations and acknowledged the importance of the lead roles of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP in addressing the epidemic. They commended the background paper for its analysis of the gender determinants of HIV/AIDS. Delegations encouraged the four agencies to expand their sharing of experiences among themselves and with other development partners. They emphasized the importance of tracking and reporting results and the impact of programmes to demonstrate how joint interventions impact gender dimensions of HIV/AIDS. They cautioned against duplication of efforts and recommended that the four organizations increase their joint initiatives within the framework of the overall United Nations reform process. Delegations requested greater accountability in the allocation of resources, particularly related to HIV/AIDS and gender issues, including women's empowerment.

21. Delegations highlighted the need to take into account socio-cultural approaches and involve key actors such as traditional and religious leaders when programming for HIV/AIDS, and supported the importance of recognizing notions of gender roles and masculinity. They emphasized the need to analyse and factor in the underlying structures in society and the vulnerabilities of women and girls in designing effective programmes. They underscored the need for increased programme resources. They also underscored the links between HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health and urged that greater attention be given to gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situations.

22. Delegations emphasized the importance of following up on the recommendations of the Global Task Team on Improving AIDS Coordination. Noting the importance of limiting parallel programming by strengthening coordination among United Nations organizations, they called for broader and better coordinated results-based approaches throughout the programme cycle, including more focused implementation and better monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.